

#12

No 92.

AN INAUGURAL THESIS  
ON  
Simulated Diseases

Ficto pectore fatur. Virgil.

By Abraham L. Cox. Perm<sup>ia</sup>.

1823.

Passed March 22<sup>d</sup> 1823

THE NATIONAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES

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Simulated Diseases.

The term Simulated Disease includes, not only those cases where disease is merely feigned, but those also, where it is counterfeited or provoked by art, for the purpose of obtaining a dispensation from employment, as in armies, or a refuge from the consequences of idleness, as in hospitals and other public institutions.

The severity of military discipline has been a fruitful source of counterfeited and feigned diseases; and the French Conscription in particular, occurring among a people of remarkable ingenuity, gave rise to many surprising instances of skill, in counterfeiting almost every variety of disease to which the human frame is subject. The artifice of feigning disease

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seems divested of criminality, when resorted to in order to avoid the dreadful necessity of abandoning home and the tender ties of relationship, to encounter a war of ambition, without any other motive than the command of tyranny, and to gratify the lust of avarice and power. But when it occurs in hospitals, it deserves severity of treatment, and justice to a benevolent publick, demands continued scrutiny and care, that the interests of the community be not sacrificed to the convenience of idle and worthless individuals.

The simulation of disease has been practised in all ages, and the names of many illustrious men are recorded in history, who for different purposes have resorted to this artifice. Ulysses pretending to be insane, that he might not leave his beloved Penelope, by going to the Trojan war, yoked a horse and a bull together, and ploughed the sea-shore, where he sowed salt instead of corn. Palamades, by placing Telemachus the infant son of Ulysses before the plough of his father, discovered the dissimulation, and

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convinced the world that he was not mad, as he turned the plough from the furrow, not to hurt his child.

To avenge the murder of his father and brother, L. Junius feigned idiocy, whence he received the surname of Brutus. His behaviour at the death of Lucretia however, sufficiently proves that he was possessed of discretion and courage; and that his apparent stupidity was only assumed.

History records many other familiar instances.

In the following verses a Roman is alluded to, who to imitate the great men of his City, feigned the gout, until he was actually attacked by it.

Vantum cura potest, et ars doloris,

Desiit fingere, Cuius podagram.

Marshall.

In hospitals, it is not unusual on the approach of spring, to find many cases of a chronic nature, as rheumatisms and coughs, which during the winter could not be remedied by the skill of the ablest practitioners, suddenly and almost miraculously cured. These cases however obscure during the

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winter, are then easily understood; and it is notori-  
ous, that one fine day in spring, will occasion the  
discharge of more patients, than all the medical  
attentions they receive during a whole winter.

Amouris is mentioned by several authorities  
as having been frequently feigned. It is easy  
for a patient to pretend that the sight of one eye  
is lost, but not always so easy for the surgeon to de-  
tect the imposture. Manducante it is said had  
been long in the habit of using belladonna to  
dilate the pupil, before it was used by surgeons  
for the same purpose. But this ingenious deception  
may be easily detected, by waiting a sufficient  
time until the effects of the narcotic subside, which  
will seldom require more than five or six hours.  
If a patient should declare that the sight of one eye  
only is lost, and no change can be observed in the  
appearance or colour of it, if the iris dilate and  
contract on the access and removal of light, it will  
not be uncharitable to suspect that patient of pre-  
tence. Sometimes this affection, when real, is at-  
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occasioned by a redundancy of the aqueous Humour. This is especially the case, when the disease is the effect of accident. The sudden application of light, or exposure to unpleasant and frightful objects, will sometimes cause the simulator involuntarily to discover a proof of his imposture. — During the French Conscription, several medical students added the law, by signing amaresic, and roasting themselves of the belladonna to dilate the pupil. Some persons are said to possess the power of expanding and contracting the pupil at pleasure. The probability of this statement receives strong support from the fact, that the parrot and some other birds possess the power of voluntary motion of the iris. Where an impostor can move the iris at pleasure, greater difficulties would necessarily be experienced in discovering the deception.

Myopia was a very common complaint in France during the Conscriptions. Spectacles became fashionable, and four times as many were seen, after the enactment of the law, as before.

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It is a sufficient ground of exemption from military service, to be affected with this depravation of sight, and spectacles, though they answer an excellent purpose in peace, would deprive the soldier of that agility of motion so necessary in war, and could not therefore be used. A near sighted person is known by the habit of corrugating the eye-brows, is always observed to have wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, and almost closes them when he examines any thing beyond the narrow sphere of his vision. The best test is to require him to read from a book, at the distance of several feet, through concave glasses as high as number three. If he can do this, he is undoubtedly a myope.

Ophthalmia is a disease often caused by introducing foreign matters into the eye, as sand, tobacco, salt, &c. An instance of a general propagation of this disease throughout a regiment, at the castle of Edinburgh, is related on the authority of Doctor Gibson, who was in Edinburgh at the time of its occurrence. The regiment was ordered to a foreign station, but were attacked

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with a disease resembling the Egyptian Ophthalmia, and of so severe a character as to render it necessary to countermand the order for their embarkation. On strict inquiry it was found to proceed from the introduction of corrosive sublimate into the eye. They all did very well as soon as the cause of irritation was removed.

In one of the wards of the Philadelphia Almshouse a woman was detected in irritating her child's eye with tartar emetic, so as to occasion around it, the peculiar pustules excited by that preparation of antimony, in order to protect her own continuance in the Medical Ward.

The instances of pretended paralysis are numerous. In the Philadelphia Almshouse, a man had long kept his bed, on pretence of having lost the use of his lower extremities. He had been under several physicians, and had tried a variety of practices, but still declared himself unable to walk to the next bed. At length on the application of a tight bandage

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and the proposal of a blister, he improved so far as to walk with some assistance the distance of twenty or thirty feet at once. Thus he continued for some time, and though his deceit was suspected by his medical attendants, they were unwilling to discharge him without further proof. At length he was found walking in the yard, unsupported and with the vigour of health, having eluded his nurses, and chosen a time not occupied in medical visits. He was immediately discharged, and walked with ease from an hospital, where he had lain for months, in the successful practice of his impositions.

It is said that the celebrated Hoscinski, who obtained a large grant of lands from the government of the United States; during his residence in this country, and while his claim was pending, was a complete cripple but immediately recovered after having secured his object.

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artificers of the profligate, and the designing, it is of much greater importance to avoid the punishment of innocent persons, on unfounded suspicion, and insufficient evidences.

An instance is related in the *Dictionnaire des Sciences Medicales*, of a conscript who had been tortured in a variety of ways, on suspicion of feigning a paralytic affection of the arm. A small cicatrix over the deltoid muscle was shown as the remains of a sabre wound, which was stated to have caused the affection, but notwithstanding this scar, that the surgeons who examined him did not think it possible, that so slight a wound could have occasioned it. Upon a reference of the case to a surgeon of superior skill, he explained the phenomenon by observing that the point of the instrument must have divided the circumflex nerves, whose branches are distributed to the fibres of the deltoid muscle. It is perhaps owing to a similar cause, that blows or falls upon that deltoid, often occasion a paralytic affection.

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reality of his affection. He refused, and was by this means induced to avow, what probably could not have been extorted from him by the severest measures.

The following instance of feigned disease of the knee was related by Doctor Gibson, who was an eye-witness of its occurrence. The celebrated Doctor Hume of Edinburgh, in going round the wards of the Royal Infirmary had his attention called to a man, who declared that he was affected with a disease of the knee which disabled him from using the joint. The marks of his imposture were however palpable, and an *argumentum ad hominem* was resorted to by the physician. He addressed the house-surgeon in the following manner. Make an incision in the skin, fill it up with tow dipped in spirits of turpentine, and set fire to it. The next day the patient could not be found.

Doctor Hennen, the author of a work on military Surgery, observes that the remedies for most diseases are sufficiently unpleasant

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to overcome the fortitude of almost every impostor, but that in some cases, men have endured the most rigorous severity with a constancy worthy of a better cause. He mentions a dragoon who bore severe riding duty for some weeks, chained to his horse, before he confessed that the chronic rheumatism of which he complained, was pretended; another man who permitted all the preparations for amputation to be made before he could be prevailed upon to straighten his knee joint; and another, who on being thrown into a deep lake, suffered himself to be almost drowned, before he would stretch out his arm to save himself by swimming, and exercise at which he was known to excel.

Epilepsy has been repeatedly counterfeited; but there are some methods of distinguishing between the real and feigned disease. Ambroise Paré mentions that vagrants and other impostors who have feigned this disease were in the habit of placing a small piece of soap in their mouths, to imitate the foam which is

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seen in real cases of epilepsy. Those who feign this disease, however, are never able to show the marks of bruises or injuries of the tongue &c. which are frequently the consequence of an actual paroxysm. The nails of an impostor are of a natural colour, and if the fingers be straightened he will in all probability carefully clench them again; while in the real epileptic, they will remain passively as they are placed. In genuine epilepsy the iris remains uninfluenced by the presence or abstraction of light; and in the feigned, the proposal of a cauterization or other harsh measures, will generally effect a speedy cure.

A villager was admitted into a French hospital to be treated for epilepsy, and had a paroxysm just as the attending surgeon entered the ward. He was found groaning, violently convulsed, and no doubt congratulating himself upon the skill with which he conducted the manœuvre. The surgeon, satisfied of the pretence of this man, addressed several of his colleagues who

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accompanied him, in those words. "I have been long looking for a case like this before us. You know know Hippocrates has said, that emuchs are exempt from gout and epilepsy. Let us castrate this man; it may probably effect a cure. Bring me the bistouries, needles, ligatures forceps &c." He will have completed the operation before his paroxysm subsides. He will be surprised then, to find himself deprived of the marks of his virility." At these words, before the operator could approach him, he rose from his prostrate position, demanded pardon, and protested, that in future he would be guiltless of such practices.

A young man presented himself to the committee appointed to examine conscripts, stating that he was afflicted with a peculiar disease, supposed to be an aneurism of the heart. His face was livid, his eyes prominent and injected, and his lips tumid. No doubt existed of the reality of his complaint, until one of the committee insisted on a more strict examination. The man opposed the measure, and

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on stripping him a tight bandage was found, rolled three times round his neck, and a similar one round each arm. These were removed, when the pulsations of his heart became natural, although still agitated by shame and fear.

Another young man was detected in the same pretence, actuated by similar motives. He was loosely dressed, and it was not until he was stripped of his clothes, that a single hair could be discovered, drawn tight around the neck, explaining sufficiently the cause of the disease.

Doctor Hennen mentions the case of a soldier, who, to obtain a discharge from military service, was in the habit of exciting the action of his heart and arteries at pleasure, without the employment of any external means. This singular power he exerted, whenever he was in sight of his officers or the surgeon of his regiment. On being closely watched however he was found when alone, to appear exactly like other men. The lividness and tumefaction of his face subsided, the pulsations

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of his arteries became regular, his features assumed a natural appearance, and no singular trait of his disorder remained. He was privately reprimanded for the artifice, and after promising in future a more exemplary conduct, was dismissed, nor was he ever afterwards troubled with a similar complaint.

Mania too has been counterfeited, but the impostor cannot endure the continued and scrutinizing gaze of his physician, as the real maniac does, but the changes of his countenance afford an evidence of the sanity of his mind, and consequently of his imposture. In mania, the stomach is generally insensible to the stimulus of an emetic, the alimentary canal is not easily affected by cathartics, and the constant vigilance of the patient sometimes renders the action of opium altogether inefficient.

An man was apprehended in New Jersey on suspicion of being a counterfeiter of bank notes, and lodged in a neighbouring prison

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He remained there eight weeks, and was afterwards removed to Philadelphia, during the whole of which time he endeavoured to impress spectators with an idea of his insanity. He affected an indifference towards those around him, pretended to be stupid and unconscious, when questions were proposed to him, and was constantly muttering to himself. His keeper and the officers who accompanied him to Philadelphia, were confident that his disease was altogether a mockery.

On his commitment to prison in Philadelphia the jailer commanded the other prisoners to strike him whenever they came near him, until he should regain his faculties. This measure had a very speedy effect, for the prisoners were so much amused with this employment, that our hero would have lost his life if he had not very speedily acknowledged his disease feigned and implored the keepers' mercy.

"A case of pretended somnolency and mental hallucination" is related by Doctor Hennen and is worthy of a brief repetition. A man who

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was enlisted into the British Army pretended  
 semivolency, and consequent incapacity of mus-  
 cular action, apparently without any adequate  
 cause. If his limbs were raised he would im-  
 mediately let them fall, except that when  
 this trial was first made, he held up one leg  
 as long as a man of ordinary strength would  
 have done. An evident difference was observed  
 between his pretended, and real sleep. Whether  
 he was unconscious of what passed around  
 him, as he desired to appear, the following  
 circumstances will show. The iris was sensi-  
 ble of the presence of light, and the orbicularis  
 palpebrarum would suddenly contract, and  
 close the eye upon the rapid approach of any  
 object. Occasionally this was disregarded. The  
 pulse was natural, was accelerated on the approach  
 of the experimenter, and sunk almost to an in-  
 sensible vibration when the test of electricity  
 was proposed. The sensus of taste and smell were  
 manifestly excitable by the usual stimulants.  
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great dislike to alect, and would not masticate any indigestible substance, as iron &c. His skin, though evidently against his inclination, showed evident marks of sensibility on the approach of a red hot wire, from which he uniformly and involuntarily shrunk. Suddenly dashing cold water in his face produced in his countenance every expression of surprise and fear. These observations were dated June 1816. Soon after this he was visited by the garrison chaplain, who gave him hopes of pardon, if he would not obstinately persist in his counterfeited pretences. Two days after, he sat up with his eyes open, occasionally moving his hands. This improvement was preceded by some convulsive motions, so evidently an imitation, as to strike every spectator. From this time he gradually improved. On account of the nuisance of a continued course of spectators, he was transported from Chelsea Hospital to London, and was admitted into Lock Hospital on the 17th of 8

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July, in a state of stupor. He would not speak, his eyes remaining open through the day, and he would eat nothing, unless fed by an attendant. Doctor James Forbes, the attending physician of the institution, under the impression, that this singular affection arose from extreme grief and fear operating on the nervous system, treated him in the most soothing manner, and except the occasional use of cathartics, to obviate constipation, no medicines were used. By the end of July, he so far recovered, as to dress himself, walk in the garden, and answer questions in a low whisper. He was finally cured, and discharged from the service.

Hæmaturia may be rudely simulated by using the beet plentifully as an article of diet. The Cactus Opuntia, or Indian Fig is mentioned by Dioscorides, as producing the same effect. The deception however may be easily recognised, and is too palpably an imposture, to pass unobserved by any

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one, who does not design to favour the fraud. Impostors have fearlessly injected into the bladder, pure blood, without apprehending the possibility of its becoming the nucleus of a stone, requiring for its removal, a severe and dangerous operation.

Hæmatemesis is said to have been feigned, by swallowing a large quantity of blood, which of itself is sufficient to excite vomiting. The deception may be detected, by observing whether any other symptoms of the disease are present or not.

Hæmoptysis is not an unfrequent presence in armies; many persons obtaining a discharge from military service, by merely puncturing the arm, and occasionally sucking the blood from it, which they discharge by coughing, whenever a suitable opportunity can be found, to deceive their attendants.

Hæmorrhoids have been imitated, by introducing into the rectum a sponge, or some such substance, to which are attached small vessels, formed of the bladders of rats, filled with blood.

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By puncturing these vesicles it will appear that they are counterfeited, for they will be found to have a small base, and to consist of a membrane altogether different from that which is found in real hemorrhoids. The impostor may be then obliged to draw from the rectum, the substance to which the vesicle is attached, and thus, furnish an irrefragable proof of the deception he has endeavoured to practise.

Hydrocele was feigned in the French army, by inflating the cellular membrane of the scrotum with air. The artifice was readily detected, and the puncture could generally be found, through which the tube had been passed for the purpose of inflation.

Hernia has been simulated in the same manner, but the touch alone is sufficient to discover the fraud.

Attempts have been frequently made to imitate jaundice, by washing the surface with solutions of certain colouring matters, but the eye always furnishes a sufficient test

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In the long catalogue of simulated diseases, incontinence of urine is of no unfrequent occurrences. When the disease is real there is a constant titillation of urine, and the surface of the glans penis is pallid, from being continually bathed in the fluid. If on the contrary the affection is pretended, it is only complained of at night and there is no dropping of urine during the day. The impostor may be detected, by administering to him a full dose of opium, and observing whether the urine is discharged during sleep or not.

Ulcers of an healthy appearance are frequently found in patients of vigorous constitution, where the surgeon would prognosticate a speedy cure, which yet remain and baffle all his efforts. It not infrequently happens in large hospitals that an ulcer will look well, and heal kindly, but as soon as the patient anticipates his discharge, without any apparent cause, it will—

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become enlarged, the fine cuticle covering it will be abraded, and the process of cure must be again renewed. Thus have patients continued the whole winter, in the Surgical wards of the Philadelphia Almshouse, whose ulcers readily heal on the return of warm weather and they leave the institution having availed themselves of it, as an asylum from the wretchedness and want, ever attendant on an idle and profligate life.

Occasionally you meet with an ulcer which appears of long standing; the surrounding surface being discoloured, resembles the cuticle covering newly-formed parts. This is however, sometimes, the effect of a blister applied around the edges of a sore, occasioned perhaps itself, by artificial means. An instance of this kind there is every reason to believe, occurred some times since in the Philadelphia Almshouse. The edges of the discoloured cuticle were too distinctly marked to be the cicatrix of an old sore and there was a well defined and regular square described by its margins. It was no

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So common is the habit in military hospitals to protract the cure of ulcers by picking and otherwise irritating them, that according to Doctor Whinnin, the army surgeons were obliged to seal their dressings, before they could effect a cure.

Besides these imitations others have been resorted to, for different purposes, and there is in fact scarcely a disease, which has not been, at one time or other, simulated so closely as to deceive even experienced persons. Ingenuity has perhaps been seldom more industriously employed, than in feigning diseases. It is indeed a subject of deep regret, that so much genius should remain dormant, or employed only in base actions, as is undoubtedly the case among the lower orders of society. We may discover and correct individual abuses of this kind, but it is left for the statesman and philanthropist

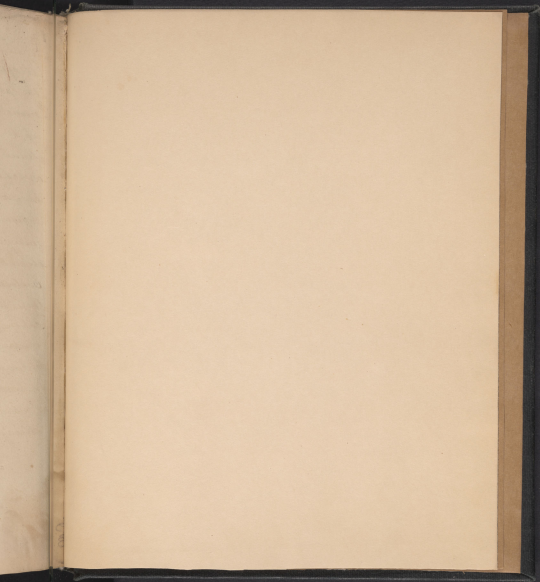
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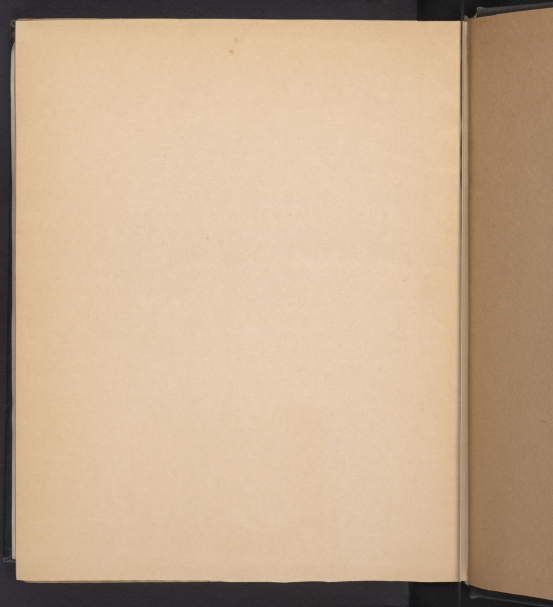
to effect such a change in the situation of the poor, that learning may inform their minds in youth, and having been trained up to habits of industry, they will not continue to encumber our poor-houses with wretchedness, and to throng our streets with beggary. It is said that in those countries, where no provisions are made for the poor, mendicancy is much less prevalent than elsewhere, and among our neighbours in the Eastern States, where for a succession of years, there has been ample provision for the education of every child within their extensive country, ignorance and idleness are so far exterminated, that it is rare to find a citizen sufficiently debased to ask publick alms, or so wretched, as to be incapable of administering to his own support.

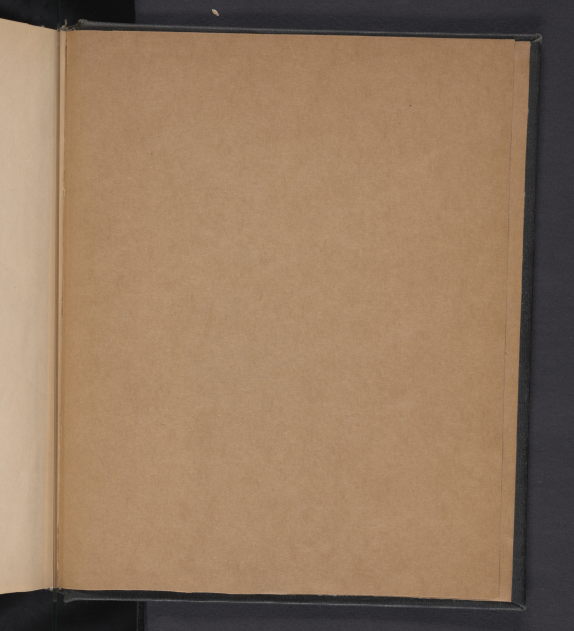
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